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**AURELIA &
OTHER POEMS**

AURELIA
& OTHER POEMS
BY ROBERT NICHOLS

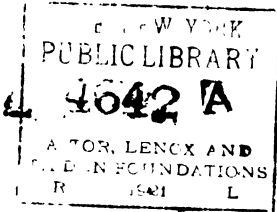


NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE

CLUB

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Printed in the United States of America

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**AURELIA &
OTHER POEMS**

Certain of the poems appeared in *The London Mercury*, *The New Statesman*, *The Owl*, *The New Witness*, *The Nation*, *The Westminster Gazette*, *The Observer*, *The Oxford Fortnightly*, etc. I desire to make the customary acknowledgments.

R. N.

March, 1920.

I.—FOUR IDYLLS

I.—SEVENTEEN

For ANNE

ALL the loud winds were in the garden wood,
All shadows joyfuller than lissom hounds
Doubled in chasing, all exultant clouds
That ever flung fierce mist and eddying fire
Across heavens deeper than blue polar seas
Fled over the sceptre-spikes of the chestnuts,
Over the speckle of the birches' green.
She shouted; then stood still, hushed and abashed
To hear her voice so shrill in that gay roar;
And suddenly her eyelashes were dimmed,
Caught in tense tears of spiritual joy:
For there were daffodils which sprightly shook
Ten thousand ruffling heads throughout the wood,
And every flower of those delighting flowers
Laughed, nodding to her, till she clapped her hands,
Crying, "O daffies, could you only speak!"
But there was more. A jay, with skyblue shaft
Set in blunt wing, skimmed screaming on ahead.
She followed him. A murrey squirrel eyed
Her wearily, cocked upon tail-plumed haunch,

Four Idylls

Then, skipping the whirligig of last-year leaves,
Whisked himself out of sight and reappeared
Leering about the bole of a young beech;
And every time she thought to corner him
He scrambled round on little scratchy hands
To peek at her about the other side.
She lost him, bolting branch to branch, at last—
The impudent brat! But still high overhead
Flight on exuberant flight of opal scud,
Or of dissolving mist, florid as flame,
Scattered in ecstasy over the blue. And she
Followed, first walking, giving her bright locks
To the cold fervour of the springtime gale,
Whose rush bore the cloud shadow past the cloud
Over the irised wastes of emerald turf.
And still the huge wind volleyed. Save the gulls,
Goldenly in the sunny blast careering
Or on blue-shadowed underwing at plunge,
None shared with her who now could not but run
The splendour and tumult of th' onrushing spring.
And now she ran no more: the gale gave plumes.
One with the shadows whirled along the grass,
One with the onward smother of veering gulls,
One with the pursuit of cloud after cloud
Swept she. Pure speed coursed in immortal limbs;
Nostrils drank as from wells of unknown air;
Ears received the smooth silence of racing floods;
Light as of glassy suns froze in her eyes;
Space was given her and she ruled all space.

Four Idylls

Spring, author of twofold loveliness,
Who flittest in the mirth of the wild folk,
Profferest greeting in the faces of flowers,
Blowest in the firmamental glory,
Renewing in the heart of the sad human
All faiths, guard thou the innocent spirit
Into whose unknowing hands this noontide
Thou pourest treasure, yet scarce recognised,
That unashamed before man's glib wisdom,
Unabashed beneath the wrath of chance,
She accept in simplicity of homage
The hidden holiness, the created emblem
To be in her, until death shall take her,
The source and secret of eternal spring.

LAWFORD,
August, 1919.

Four Idylls

2.—THE SPRIG OF LIME

For EDWARD MARSH

HE lay, and those who watched him were amazed
To see unheralded beneath the lids
Twin tears, new-gathered at the price of pain,
Start and at once run crookedly athwart
Cheeks channelled long by pain, never by tears.
So desolate, too, the sigh next uttered
They had wept also, but his great lips moved,
And bending down one heard, "A sprig of lime;
Bring me a sprig of lime." Whereat she stole
With dumb signs forth to pluck the thing he craved.

So lay he till a lime-twigg had been snapped
From some still branch that swept the outer grass
Far from the silver pillar of the bole,
Which mounting past the house's crusted roof
Split into massy limbs, crossed boughs, a maze
Of close-compacted intercontorted staffs
Bowered in foliage, where through the sun
Shot sudden showers of light or crystal spars,
Or wavered in a green and vitreous flood.
And all the while in faint and fainter tones,
Scarce audible on deepened evening's hush,

Four Idylls

He framed his curious and last request
For "lime, a sprig of lime." Her trembling hand
Closed his loose fingers on the awkward stem,
Covered above with gentle heart-shaped leaves
And under dangling, pale as honey-wax,
Square clusters of sweet-scented starry flowers.

She laid his bent arm back upon his breast,
Then watched above white knuckles clenched in prayer.
He never moved. Only at last his eyes
Opened, then brightened in such avid gaze
She feared the coma mastered him again. . . .
But no; strange sobs rose chuckling in his throat,
A stranger ecstasy suffused the flesh
Of that just mask so sun-dried, gouged, and old,
Which few—too few!—had loved, too many feared.
"Father!" she cried; "Father!"

He did not hear.

She knelt, and kneeling drank the scent of limes,
Blown round the slow blind by a vesperal gust,
Till the room swam. So the lime-incense blew
Into her life as once it had in his,
Though how and when and with what ageless charge
Of sorrow and deep joy how could she know?
Sweet lime that often at the height of noon
Diffusing dizzy fragrance from your boughs,
Tasselled with blossoms more innumerable
Than the black bees, the uproar of whose toil

Four Idylls

Filled your green vaults, winning such metheglin
As clouds their sappy cells, distil, as once
Ye used, your sunniest emanations
Toward the window where a woman kneels—
She who within that room in childish hours
Lay through the lasting murmur of blanch'd noon
Behind the sultry blind, now full, now flat,
Drinking anew of every odorous breath,
Supremely happy in her ignorance
Of Time that hastens hourly and of Death
Who need not haste. Scatter your fumes, O lime,
Loose from each hispid star of citron bloom,
Tangled beneath the labyrinthine boughs,
Cloud on such stinging cloud of exhalation
As reeks of youth, fierce life, and summer's prime,
Though hardly now shall he in that dusk room
Savour your sweetness, since the very sprig,
Profuse of blossom and of essences,
He smells not, who in a paltering hand
Clasps it laid close his peaked and gleaming face
Propped in the pillow. Breathe silent, lofty lime,
Your curfew secrets out in fervid scent
To the attendant shadows! Tinge the air
Of the midsummer night that now begins,
At an owl's oaring flight from dusk to dusk,
And downward caper of the giddy bat
Hawking against the lustre of bare skies,
With something of th' unfathomable bliss
He, who lies lying there, knew once of old

Four Idylls

In the serene trance of a summer night,
When with th' abundance of his young bride's hair
Loosed on his breast he lay and dared not sleep,
Listening for the scarce motion of your boughs,
Which sighed with bliss as she with blissful sleep,
And drinking desperately each honied wave
Of perfume wafted past the ghostly blind,
First knew th' implacable and bitter sense
Of Time that hastes and Death who need not haste.
Shed your last sweetness, limes!

But now no more.

She, fruit of that night's love, she heeds you not,
Who bent, compassionate, to the dim floor,
Takes up the sprig of lime and presses it
In pain against the stumbling of her heart,
Knowing, untold, he cannot need it now.

LAWFORD,
July, 1919.

3.—THE DELIVERER

For MAX BEERBOHM

TO look at her (but no one looked at her—
For misery does not look upon itself,
Having seen its ills too often) you would think,
“God help her—there’s a miserable slut.”
Yet she was barely turned eighteen, and human,
If aught of human knew to flourish there,
Where, being bastard, she received some wage
As hireling, and the daughter’s privilege
Of being worse abused than a hired girl,
Without the free choice to endure or quit
That darkened house where but the Weary came.

It was an inn that had not known good cheer
All its days through, accepting the stray’s lot
Of blight from birth; solitary it stood
Beside the road, and in its ancient heart
Melancholy, that grieves in wood and stone
Longer than in the fleeting soul of man.
Who pines but fourscore years, all seasons lodged
Desolately peering from its darkened face,
While the smirched sign groaned softly in the wind.

Four Idylls

None visited it but such at evening bound
To the next holt as here might find his knees
Sheer loosed by weariness, or the luckless ones
Whom Chance and the loud wind and hunger drive
From bourne to bourne, from hill to homeless hill,
Till merciful silence and a pauper's grave
For ever cloak this nipped flesh from the blast,
From hunger's gripe and malison of Chance.

And even such, if in his weeds he clapped
Odd coppers together, stolen, begged, or earned,
Distastefully eyed before he cluttered in
Those dismal eaves whence rust-rills had run down
To fog the bulging plaster, those bleared panes
That lividly glassed each slant decrepit lattice
Of sagging casements, where the sunset stretched
Into a thread and nothingness and night.

Thus then without: within a darkness bode,
So deep between the cupboards and the doors,
Under the burden of the lifeless beams,
Among black settles, with th' unkindled lamp
Hung, slothlike, in dim chains above her head;
She often turned toward the leaded squares,
Drably aglitter with stale autumn rain,
As if she feared whatever hope she kept
Oozed hourly now as day's bare light withdrew.

Four Idylls

Into such darkness off the squally road
Faring nowhence this soul's Deliverer came.

O duped of the world, by need or greed long hardened,
By self distracted and the hurry of hours,
Ruled short by Fate and shortened more by man,
Who seeks he knows not what and finding not
Still hastens more, in folly's ignorance urged,
In quest for somewhat to deliver him
From his pain's ache, clue never to be found
But in the very chambers of his heart,
Hear Pity grieving for existences
Which, flesh or dust, hide secrets yet more sad
Than Pity's self and being delivered so!

There came a feeble clinking at the latch;
The sulking of the wind rose to a gust;
The door banged wide: dimming the light he stood,
His breath screeched softly like a blunted saw.
She lifted eyes encountering shadowy eyes,
Then sideways glanced. His palm was outward
stretched

Holding four pennies: the only four he had,
She hazarded, so nodded. "There. Sit down."
He sank. She tended him. He stared or drowsed.
And he remained three days. She slipped her coin
Into his hand when the score stood to pay:
Three days, three nights, and hardly spoke a word,
If speech be sound, but every sign was speech
For her whom wretchedness had taught to hear.

Four Idylls

He was a spectre, phantom of a man,
Silently sitting there with hands outspread
Upon the board, with wasted head forth craning
Like a strange bird, which peers now here, now there,
Slowly—for what? mere nothing all the time.

How slow he ate! he used his mumbling mouth
As if not truly his . . . with terror swallowed,
Clutching the table top; and when he drank
Hunched shoulders at long shivers down his back,
Or gulped and sighed, waiting with tight shut eyes:
He had a peck of trouble in his throat.

When he had done he brushed the plate away,
And vacant sat and ever vacant sat,
Until she ached who did not dare to rouse
His spirit from its hollow reverie,
While nothing sounded but the clicking clock
And the irregular screaming of his breath.

Sometimes, returning softly from the dark,
She saw him with a dropping news-sheet spread
Upon the board, spied a lean finger trace
Print hush'dly spelled by the scarce-moving lips,
Spelled once, the sheet then folded gently up, and
thrust,
Twixt shirt and coat with a slow wealth of care.
Looking for jobs?—mere habit turned a tic.
A job indeed! he was past all jobs now.

[11]

Four Idylls

She ever found that toward six o'clock
His life ebb'd most, his torpid body leaned
Against the board, while in his eyes awoke
The dim reflection of a hideous dream,
Which slowly gathered and became his life.
His life! it was his life! A spasm shook
That body from the scant hair to the heels;
He clutched himself, the thin lips fell apart,
The head lolled over on its broken stalk,
The eyes turned up, half-lidded, wholly white,
He gaped at truth, while knowledge interfused
His face till it set dreary as a doll's.

She stooped then by him, withering with pain;
But he—he made no sound, just drooped and sank.
On the last night he took her hand in his;
Some shadow hovered faintly in his brain;
He shook his head, then sighed. The hand dropped
down.

"I am a carpenter," he said at last.
And that was all. By daylight he had gone.

That night not stirless lay she in her bed,
As on her back these three nights she had lain,
While the cold tears welled hugely in her eyes
And crinkling over wetted hair and ears;
For now she hammered, hammered with her fists

Four Idylls

Close clenched, and with her angry muscle strung
so taut
That not a sound rebounded from the wall.

All day she never spoke, but eyed the panes,
Saw the rain beaded on the dreary lead
Drop to the lead below, heard the wind ooze
Under the scuffling lattice till the air
Was wholly sodden even within doors,
Shivered and shrinking, drew her shawl more close.
"He's nought, poor daft lad, and I should forget him,
It isn't very long that he'll be sick:
His hope is near!"

The dark room seemed more dark.
But when the third night came she slowly climbed
Up to her attic, refuge sole she had
In the wide world; there by the candlelight,
Without or sensible hope or eagerness,
Gathering up her little earthly store,
She wrapped it in a skirt, stole softly down,
Not knowing how or why she did this thing,
But trusting somehow, somewhere, at some time
She'd meet with him again—pushed on the door,
Looked panting round, stepped out, then pulled it to,
And through the surging darkness followed him.

BLACK MOUNTAINS,
Nov., 1919.

Four Idylls

4.—NIGHT RHAPSODY

For FLORENCE LAMONT

HOW beautiful it is to wake at night,
When over all there reigns the ultimate spell
Of complete silence, darkness absolute,
To feel the world, tilted on axle-tree,
In slow gyration, with no sensible sound,
Unless to ears of unimagined beings,
Resident incorporeal or stretched
In vigilance of ecstasy among
Ethereal paths and the celestial maze.
The rumour of our onward course now brings
A steady rustle, as of some strange ship
Darkling with soundless sail all set and amply filled
By volume of an ever-constant air,
At fullest night, through seas for ever calm,
Swept lovely and unknown for ever on.

How beautiful it is to wake at night,
Embalmed in darkness watchful, sweet, and still,
As is the brain's mood flattered by the swim
Of currents circumvolvent in the void,
To lie quite still and to become aware
Of the dim light cast by nocturnal skies

Four Idylls

On a dim earth beyond the window-ledge,
So, isolate from the friendly company
Of the huge universe which turns without,
To brood apart in calm and joy awhile
Until the spirit sinks and scarcely knows
Whether self is, or if self only is,
For ever. . . .

How beautiful to wake at night,
Within the room grown strange, and still, and sweet,
And live a century while in the dark
The dripping wheel of silence slowly turns,
To watch the window open on the night,
A dewy silent deep where nothing stirs,
And, lying thus, to feel dilate within
The press, the conflict, and the heavy pulse
Of incommunicable sad ecstasy,
Growing until the body seems outstretched
In perfect crucifixion on the arms
Of a cross pointing from last void to void,
While the heart dies to a mere midway spark.

All happiness thou holdest, happy night,
For such as lie awake and feel dissolved
The peaceful spice of darkness and the cool
Breath hither blown from the ethereal flowers
That mist thy fields! O happy, happy wounds,
Conditioned by existence in humanity,

Four Idylls

That have such powers to heal them! slow sweet
sighs

Torn from the bosom, silent wails, the birth
Of such long-treasured tears as pain his eyes,
Who, waking, hears the divine solitudes
Of midnight with ineffable purport charged.

How beautiful it is to wake at night,
Another night, in darkness yet more still,
Save when the myriad leaves on full-fledged boughs,
Filled rather by the perfume's wandering flood
Than by dispansion of the still sweet air,
Shall from the furthest utter silences
In glimmering secrecy have gathered up
An host of whisperings and scattered sighs,
To loose at last a sound as of the plunge
And lapsing seethe of some Pacific wave,
Which, risen from the star-thronged outer troughs,
Rolls in to wreath with circling foam away
The flutter of the golden moths that haunt
The star's one glimmer daggered on wet sands.

So beautiful it is to wake at night!
Imagination, loudening with the surf
Of the midsummer wind among the boughs,
Gathers my spirit from the haunts remote
Of faintest silence and the shades of sleep,
To bear me on the summit of her wave
Beyond known shores, beyond the mortal edge

Four Idylls

Of thought terrestrial, to hold me poised
Above the frontiers of infinity,
To which in the full reflux of the wave
Come soon I must, bubble of solving foam,
Borne to those other shores—now never mine
Save for a hovering instant, short as this
Which now sustains me ere I be drawn back—
To learn again, and wholly learn, I trust,
How beautiful it is to wake at night.

BLACK MOUNTAINS,
Dec., 1919.

II.—ENCOUNTERS

For ALDOUS HUXLEY

1.—THE STRANGER

NEVER am I so alone
As when I walk among the crowd:
Blurred masks of stern or grinning stone,
Unmeaning eyes and voices loud.

Gaze dares not encounter gaze . . .
Humbled I turn my head aside;
When suddenly there is a face . . .
Pale, subdued, and grievous-eyed.

Ah, I know that visage meek,
Those trembling lips, the eyes which shine,
But turn from that which they would seek
With an air piteous, divine!

There is not a line or scar,
Seal of a sorrow or disgrace,
But I know like sigils are
Burned in my heart and on my face.

[18]

Speak! O speak! Thou art the one!
But thou hast passed with sad head bowed;
And never am I so alone
As I walk among the crowd.

2.—ENCOUNTER

To-day you meet a woman or a man:
It seems he blends with you and you with him
At the first glance; immediately you can
Speak as you would. Your happy senses swim.
The world's shrill voices ebb, its colours shrink . . .
It shuts behind, goes out. In gentle blindness
Of light you smile, join hands across the brink,
Launch wing on deeps of beauty and loving-kindness.

You part at last. How boldly the eyes say
"It's You . . . it's You . . . ah, this is not the end."
And all the homeward way
From your high heart how wells the warm bright
hymn
Of praise to happiness and of your friend!
That night you wake, put hand out for a match. . . .
But no: "Why read? for I have found a book:
I wonder how his heart thinks? There, I catch
This moment that his last sad-happy look."

And the next day—quite suddenly—you're sad. . . .
Perhaps he needs you now. How slow time is!

Encounters

No matter, "it" will be better, you will have had
These hours to plot that hour's dear sanctities.

You must not go too fast: you will disclose
First this, then that. You'll pause . . . and he will
say
"Yes, I——" for he has secrets, too, and those
Will be as sweet as yours to hear and weigh.

His face was sad, and long you ponder why. . . .

No matter, you will see him, you will know.
And time creeps on. "Should he speak first or I?
And what? But old friends do not trouble so—
They let what will be turn out as it may."

To night: head aches, heart beats, your mouth is dry.
Now the hour strikes. You hurry on your way.

You meet.

It was nothing, and you wish to die.

3.—TWO FRIENDS, TWO NIGHTS

He sighs at me. I know that he is vexed.
And suddenly we both feel proud and meek:
Meek that one is so eager to speak next,
Proud that one has such holy truth to speak.

It was not so last week:
We both spoke truth, and neither was perplexed.
Here, smoking by the fire, we sat alert,
Each turning thought about inside his head;
It never struck us to think, "*That* might hurt,
You never know . . . best leave the thing unsaid."
The lamp sang, and we watched the sudden pert
Pas seul of a dainty choreographic flame,
Who on the black above the furnace-red
Twirled thrice and vanished spritely as she came.
We laughed at that, with "Programme—quick, her
name!"
For when one wished to speak he spoke.

To-night it is not the same.
He takes the rod, and, sighing, begins to poke . . .
And I, too, think, "Can I dismiss this claim
Of friendship? friendship—a mere parlour-game!"

But neither can. So impotent we sit
Avoiding issues, while each thinks, "It's I.
There's something wrong with me. I will submit.
Let him say what he likes: I will not fight.
Humour him sometimes." So then clumsily
He does, and only trouble comes of it:
"I say, you know, you do seem glum to-night!"
"I'm not—it's you." (Oh, damn!)
And when we part, still rueful at the core,
We grin our friendship (has not each release?);

Encounters

Yet when alone wish ourselves close once more,
For then we learn—and learn, of course, too late—
That it was neither would not let us share in peace,
But only that merest nothing men call “Fate.”

4.—THE EXPRESS: HEREFORD TO LONDON

On sways the tilting train:
We feel the carriage bluffly sideways blown,
We see the chill shower brighten on the pane,
We hear the high wind through the lantern moan,
We three borne ever through the wind and rain,
We three who meet here not to meet again,
We three poor faring fools who sit alone.

Now is the time if so be you would speak:
Why, being friend, be proud or why be meek?
Or to be meek or proud is to be weak.
He sits in shoddy clothes and he is shy,
Being of the sort that will avoid the eye
Lest his disquieted heart should loose a cry.

But as he sits he aches in every limb,
He is so tired that his eyes are dim
And touch at yours. Now speak to him.

On swings the pounding train:
Hard hail raps by. You dare not speak again.

Encounters

She sits well-bred, well-dressed, but does not shun
The looks of others. An aged winter sun
She is, and dozes and peeps briefly out in fun.

Why be so meek? She hears the loud wheels whir.
She wearies. She would sleep but for the stir . . .
She feigns a look shot past. Now speak to her.

Loud shrills the buried train:
Darkness. It clears. You dare not speak again.

But the giant Train begins a confident song:
"Why be so meek, so proud, when both are wrong?
He who would love, must learn, learn to be strong!"

Suddenly all three speak as from one brain.
We do not feel the carriage sideways blown,
Nor see the chill shower brighten on the pane,
Nor hear the high wind in the lantern moan,
We three borne ever through the wind and rain,
We three who meet here not to meet again,
We three sweet fools who do not sit alone.

On storms the soaring train.

1, LONDON, *May*, 1918; and

2, 3, 4, BLACK MOUNTAINS, *Nov.*, 1919.

III.—SONNETS TO AURELIA

"Sunt, qui se ipsos in pace tenent et cum aliis etiam pacem habent. Et sunt, qui nec pacem habent nec alios in pace dimittunt; aliis sunt graves, sed sibi sunt semper graviores. Et sunt, qui se ipsos in pace retinent et ad pacem alios reducere student."—THOMAS À KEMPIS.

"Let me no steps but of lost labour trace."

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

I

AURELIA, when our bodies shall be rotten,
Our holy rites and our unsanctioned revel,
Alike of this inquisitive world forgotten,
Which watches me and you my angel-devil,
Still shall the World-to-come our love review,
Dissect my pain and analyse your pride,
Dispute our deeds and their complexions' hue,
And over our right and wrong wrongly divide.

For as in love not any rest I have
Save in the course of love truly recorded,
So the late world shall rest not by our grave
From ever revaluing the love I worded;
But we who our love's qualities best know
Shall then enlighten it no more than now.

[24]

II

SEEING your eyes I know where sorrow is,
So steadfastly they contradict your youth,
So ag'd a blue tincts their drugged irises,
So blank are the pupils fixed on deadly truth.
Who gave you these most terrible of eyes,
That never, never, never know to weep,
That have become my life's unpitying spies,
Nor sleep themselves nor suffer me to sleep?

Fell Fortune you such gifts of sorrow made
The torment, which she deals you, to express,
Thus an afraid world to make more afraid
By utterance of all possible haplessness,
So, in her end, to silence such as I
Who to Her power your being would deny.

III

WHEN the proud World does most my world
despise,

Vaunting what most my human heart must grieve,
Choosing what most I value to disprize,

Deriding most that which I most believe—
When the proud World, I say, does most offend

The artless passion of my patient heart,
Till I despair the morrow make amend,

And before sunset from the sun would part:

Then in my ruin's hour remembrance brings

Faith to my doubt, to my intention grace,

Reminding me how feebly fall such stings

On one whose eyes dared once your eyes to face,

And read in them, what no ill can remove,

The love that to the lover said, "*I love.*"

IV

LOVER," you say; "how beautiful that is,
That little word!" and still you sigh it over
Till the twin syllables become a kiss
Against the brow your lips' light whisperings cover.
Yes, it is beautiful. I have marked it long,
Long in my dusty head its jot secreted,
Yet my heart never knew this word a song
Till in the night softly by you repeated.

"Lover" again! sounds not this holy word
Worthy the gift its virtues celebrate,
Whose very gentle syllables half-heard
Seem the low sigh of one love-satiate?
Turn, sweet, and let your lips to me discover
The final sweetness lies in the word "lover."

V

THOUGH to your life apparent stain attach,
Yet to my eyes more fair shines its hid fame;
Though tongues repeat what deceived eyes may catch,
Yet to my ears your praise grows, not your blame;
Though of yourself, yourself make ill report,
The voice that speaks, so speaking, counters you;
Though to your heart, your heart impute false sport,
Yet by its height I know it calm and true.

I grow love-wise that was but worldly-wise,
My sight is healed by my own bitter tears,
My truth more proved by these disprovèd lies,
My faith more firm for these unfounded fears;
For now I know you never shall deceive
Till my belief your truth shall misbelieve.

VI

I THAT have been so overwhelmed with love
Beyond all ultimate hope or my poor merit,
How can I give fit thanks or thanks enough
Whose tongue but ill does serve its master Spirit?
So much of thanks each hour in me has risen
Not my life's years such quantity could tell,
Such height of thanks that my poor tongue would
wizen
Dared it assay such quality to spell.

Take, then, such thanks as inability
Ever to express does most such thanks express,
Having upon my incapacity pity,
As you have had upon my love's duress,
And in acceptance of such thanks forgive
The poor return for love my lips contrive,

VII

MIDNIGHT; and as the compass' arrowy shaft
Time on a single point itself sustained
Unswerving, the fire whitened in the draught,
Without the exiled ninny winds complained.
In that still minute I became aware,
Seeing you in your sleep so rosily lie,
How far apart even we lovers are,
How brief the hours for knowledge ere we die.

Eternity opened as a black abyss,
Splitting the floor to engulf and drown us ever . . .
Whereat in vertigo I stooped a kiss,
Challenging Time that moment's bond to sever,
When, deep sunk yet, you made a tender sign,
And tenderly sighed a name. It was not mine.

VIII

NOT the scritch owl that does the night afflict
So much offends as your outrageous tongue,
Concealing what love seeks to interdict
Wherever faith is from affection sprung:
Yet lie, be bold, be loud; better the slips
Your false tongue makes, telling the truth in lies,
Than that I should behold about your lips
The silent smile confutes your honest eyes.

Be base indeed, if you deem baseness thrust
Upon you by some heartless freak of nature;
O even be base if, contrary, you lust
Of your own will your fairness to disfeature—
Only I beg you in your madness be
Base only, and not also false to me!

IX

YOUR evil heart is grained with so much good,
Or your good heart is grained with so much evil,
Doubtful I am whether I rightly should
Fancy you human angel or noble devil.
Now of your sin a sorrowful song you make
Till I believe you fell scarce mortally tried,
Anon like a damned blasphemer at the stake
You hymn through fire your black impenitent pride.

But, whether you be an angel or a demon,
You are my fate, and I adore you so,
That, blacker than devil, weaker than any woman,
Whether to heaven or to hell you go,
So only I may that hour's fortune share,
Or heaven or hell, how little shall I care!

X

WHEN, having written much, I reach my span,
And you, that you, shall halt beside my grave,
Whom I to delirium loved as living man,
Mourn not that me, though, mayhap, the World
have
Honoured my tomb with register of worth
In difficult assessment of my due,
Recorded my rarer services on earth,
And grief protested, likely enough true.

Mourn not that me, but gazing on the mould,
Summon to memory my eyes' keen light,
My thorough hands, my arms so hard in hold,
My lips whose kisses burned away the night:
For, though the World may curious worths discover
My pride it is I was your well-prized lover.

XI

I AM not rancorous, but there is in you
Something that would a very Angel harry,
An amaurosis as to what is due
To those who bear the cross yourself should carry.
For gratitude, the opium of the weak,
I never begged, but I will not abide
That when most in my debt you should most wreak
On me the mortifications of your pride.

No, no, by Heaven! since I have had such care
That when the most I have your burden borne,
Then least your light-heart self should be aware
Of what might else cause you yourself to scorn:
Wherefore put reins upon your hasty tongue,
Lest, wronging me, yourself you later wrong.

XII

LET not my railing in your thought provoke
Unjust suspicion of my dark intent;
That I do rail proves with how firm a yoke
You have constrained a spirit turbulent.
For did I love you less I might have smiled
The gross misfittings of light love away,
Nor when I loved you most have most reviled,
And when most slave disputed most your sway.

Yet let not my raillery mere idleness,
The expected outcome of a frantic love,
Be to your ears. The huge yoke's heaviness
First will the captive to rough railing move,
But after, the load growing on his head,
He will be silent, and you find him—dead.

XIII

SOMETIMES I think you know not what love is
But only pang of amorous delight:
The terrible resuscitation of the kiss,
And the prolonged love-agonies of the night.
Oh, when I so do think, then I could sear
These loving lips with the consuming coal,
Submit these limbs to the machine to tear
And ruin my body to secure your soul.

For rather would I perish as a man,
And hateful as a maniac seem to you,
Than that our joy, which in true love began,
Should, in abuse, turn to its birth untrue.
Wherefore take heed lest, in your passion strong,
Your acts read right but your intention wrong.

XIV

YOUR sunflower hair falling about your head
Is pale as from blonde orichalcum spun;
Your eyes are blue as your small mouth is red,
Pursed up as if pronouncing the word "one."
Your fingers, with their fiery stone, are slim;
Shallow your breast and swift your tenting side,
And your cool-costumed suppleness of limb
Gives you an air of ease and delicate pride.

The slenderness, purity, and magnificence
Of the magnolia's alabaster flower
Are yours, and from you floats an effluence
Of a like cloistered and voluptuous power:
Thus limn I you, knowing, alas, too well
That outward heaven hides an inward hell.

XV

NOW that the summer of our love is past,
And no green shoots of all the tender grain
Which on each other's heart we reckless cast,
Spring up, but new weeds upon old weeds gain,
How must we mourn or in more bitter mood
Each lay to each the onus of this fate,
That what once seemed the promise of all good
Should now in proven ill be terminate.

Oh, of our myriad kisses did outsum
The celestial jewels of an August night,
Think! and, when minded to be rash, be dumb,
Lest, looking on past bliss and present spite,
We curse the hour each first of each was seen,
And wish what then was had now never been!

XVI

BUT piteous things we are—when I am gone,
Dissolved in the detritus of the pits,
And you, poor drivelling disregarded crone,
Bide blinking at memory between drowsy fits,
Within the mouldering ball-room of your brain,
That once was filled fantastically bright
With dancers eddying to a frantic strain,
What ghosts will haunt the last hours of the light?

Among the mothlike shadows you will mark
Two that most irk you, that with gesture human
Yet play out passion heedless of the dark:
A desperate man and a distracted woman,
And you mayhap will vaguely puzzle, "Who
Is she? and he? why do they what they do?"

Sonnets to Aurelia

XVII

WHAT fool's perversity is in your wit,
You name Aurelia in such light-heart fashion
Without, blockhead my friend, some pause at it—
You blind to her beauty and my gnawing passion?
Twice blind! next, as the proverbial devil, dumb!
Speak, Thing: you saw her. Wore she white?
green? rose?
Sighed she? Was her smile quick or slow to come?
Did her tongue slay? Kept she her love-looks
close?

What, nothing? Though she spoke you did not mark
For whom she spoke? With whom she went or
came?
If he were mild and fair? or chillily dark?
Nor even what accent, chancing on my name,
To that poor waif she deemed it fit to lend?
I am vastly comforted. Thanks, my good friend.

XVIII

WHEN you are dead my heart shall have some
peace,

Such wonderful quiet shall lie upon your grave
Under the dappled heavens' moonlit fleece,

Among slant headstones where the nettles wave.
"When you are dead"—O dull and bitter when!

Since till that hour I must, as now, abide,
Hourly appeased, hourly incensed again,
Ere I can taste that peace I am denied.

Yet, at your death, how shall my wretched heart

Enjoy at last its ever-uncaptured quiet,
Whose hours from peace the memoried you will part
With frivolous grief or with disgraceful riot:
For, whether now you live or you now die,
All gifts to love save peace to love have I.

Sonnets to Aurelia

XIX

COME, let us sigh a requiem over love
That we ourselves have slain in love's own bed,
Whose hearts that had courage to drink enough
Lacked courage to forbid the taste they bred,
Which body captained soon, till, in disgust,
These very hearts of bodily surfeit died,
Poisoned by that sweet overflow of lust
Whose past delight our substance deified.

No courage, no, nor pleasure have we now,
To our own frantic bodies are we tossed,
Only sometimes exhaustion will allow
Us peace to observe the image of love's ghost,
With torturing voice and with hid face return
Faintly, as even now, to bid us mourn.

XX

WHATEVER substances of love may dwell
Within the passionate heart of such as I,
Whatever waters of pure pity well
In the dark orb of a most loving eye,
I have yielded you. Whatever were the pain
If power within me so to do did live,
I, at your need, had made these yours again,
But now I know I have no more to give.

Your rouged lips are not redder than the blood
You have degusted at my life's hid source,
Your cruel eyes no bluer than the flood
Of tears I have shed about your froward course;
Therefore, I say, no further impost make
Upon my love, lest its life, too, you take.

XXI

EXCRUCIATE me, then, if dealing pain
Can to your hapless heart bring any pleasure;
Make writhe my pride with frivolous disdain,
Mock my heart's fulness with your own's short
measure,
Make vile my words, my honour's trust abuse
By what the most sordid count dull infamy,
To your heart's good all audience refuse,
Preferring evil to more torture me.

Aye, do your most: enjoy in constant ill
The suzerainty you have on me imposed,
Discipline my good will to your evil will,
And my each virtue to the vice opposed—
Do this, and whatsoever else to joy may move you,
Only, oh! never say: "*I do not love you.*"

XXII

CORRUPT, corrupt!—the mildness of your eyes,
Your patience dangerous bids me beware
In every look some miracle of lies,
In every gesture foulness aping fair.
Wherefore this instant gentleness of use,
Which likes me not since that I fear it feigned
To further a more deliberate abuse,
Or by a feared divulgence past constrained?

Learn, did I mark the North wind norward blow,
Tinderwood sink where floated clumsy iron,
Fire in a still pool freeze, frost chafing glow,
And the plump ewe slaughter the starving lion,
I would believe all self from self estranged
Sooner than that your impure heart had changed.

XXIII

NOW any man may love you, but not I,
For I, by heaven, have done with you for ever;
See, I am calm of hand, of lip, of eye;

If I am cold, love bred not this chill fever.
So calm I am that, gazing, I can plumb

Your heart's most abject depth, assess within
Your eyes, with not a sigh, the whole poor sum
Of your unfounded pride and random sin.

Ah, calm I am indeed; but dare you speak,
If you should proffer me one double look,
I'll take no oath but forthwith I might wreak
A justice hardly sanctioned by the Book;
Therefore this cruel instant get you gone.
Find out more suitable playthings. I have done.

XXIV

WHAT have I done, being with struggle quit
Of that which would my very life destroy,
That to my bankrupt heart I must admit
My freedom is a curse, my thrall was joy?
To-day I would have summoned her to sight,
But found her very likeness from me fled
Save in an obscene gesture of the night,
As if, having died, she wantoned with the dead;

Return, return, whether defaced by all
The cruelties of your life's devouring greeds
Or wholly corrupted by the funeral
Lust of the worm who on your substance feeds;
For rather would I such thrall should me damn
Than, free, remain the cipher that I am.

XXV

YOUR eyes, your piteous eyes, so bright and blue,
That sorely once my former life perplexed,
Who cherished the beauty of their heavenly hue,
And by the spell of their proud pain was vexed,
To what sibyllic purpose do they haunt
Unseasonably the hours I vow to joy,
With such fierce looks as do my courage daunt,
And almost would my very life destroy?

Ah, get you gone; the past is but the past;
You have no part in what is acted here.
Why should your eyes-of-the-Medusa blast
The late hours' promise of a little cheer?
But all in vain I cry: one glance alone
Of your dead eyes turns my live heart to stone.

XXVI

OH, with what art have you possessed my mind
That, aping martyr, you invade my sleep,
Lovely as once, and, yes, even more unkind,
Willing I should in very slumber weep!
For is not this the third unpitying night
On which, unmanned by grief, in palpitant haste,
I wake to find huge tears confuse my sight,
And my wry mouth offended at their taste?

Torment me not! Why should you harass me
As if this luckless I had done you wrong,
Whose only crime—if crime it reckoned be—
Is to have borne your folly overlong?
Therefore relent, lest, frantic, I forsake
This night for one whose peace you cannot break.

XXVII

I MUST remember now how once I woke
To find the harsh lamplight stream upon our bed,
The ceiling tremble in its giddy smoke,
And on the wall the agile spider spread,
To hear the reverberate vault of silence shake
Beneath the hollow crash of midnight's toll,
Whose profound strokes waned impotent to break
The charnel stillness of the city's soul.

These I remember, but would more forget
What is most fixed, whereby I am undone,
How white, how still you lay, though shuddering yet
In the last luxury of oblivion,
As if of Death you had taken love long denied,
With on your face the bliss of suicide.

THE BLACK MOUNTAINS, 23rd Nov., 1919;
OXFORDSHIRE, 16th Feb., 1920.

IV.—FROM "THE BUDDED BRANCH"

For NORAH DENNY

1.—THE VISITOR

OVER the sad, the piteous, ruttled plain
Drifts and drifts the long rain,
And, perhaps,
Comes and taps, and looks in, and taps again on
the pane,
Like a Poor Thing gone mad.
Rain complains—Time has taken the hope Rain
once had—
“Speak to me, man,” Rain says, “I am sad, so sad,
There is nothing but pain;
Speak to me, to Old Rain,” Rain says.
“Aren’t you, too, sad?”

“Aye, Rain, Old Boy, I am sad, a long time sad;
Young too, many years remain,
And I must finish them all who have never been
glad,
I, who know, too, very well what each will contain.
Pity me, Rain, Old Rain,
I shall never go mad,

[51]

From "The Budded Branch"

But shall sit here listening, enduring, sad, sad,
and quite sane,
Chained, so I cannot go where I would;
So pity me; I pity you,
Rain."

Thus all day long I sit, while Rain
And I pity each other.
Poor two!

BRAY,
Summer, 1918.

2.—THE CONSUMMATION

THERE is a pigeon in the apple-tree,
And when he moves the petals fall in showers,
And O how low, how slow, how rapturously,
He croons and croons again among the flowers!

Above the boughs a solemn cloud-bank climbs,
White, pure white, dazzling, a shield of light;
Speck on its space, a lark, whose quick song chimes
With each brief pulse of wings, vaults t'ward the
height.

Below, a beetle on a stalk of grass
Slowly unharnesses his shuttered wings,
His tiny rainbow wings of shrivelled glass.
He leaps! He whirrs away. The grass-blade swings.

Faint breezes through the branches wind and call.
It is the hour. This perfect hour is His,
Who, stooping through the depth, quiet, joy of all,
Prints on my upturned face a silent kiss.

BRAY,
Summer, 1918.

V.—TWO SONGS OF THE ENIGMA

For L. F. S.

1.—A WANDERING THING

THE hopeless rain, a sigh, a shadow,
Falters and drifts again . . . again . . . over
the meadow;
It wanders lost, drifts hither . . . thither . . .
It blows, it goes it knows not whither.

A profound grief, an unknown sorrow
Wanders always my strange life thorough;
I know not ever what brings it hither,
Nor whence it blows, nor goes it whither.

BRAY,
Summer, 1918.

Two Songs of the Enigma

2.—MODERN LOVE SONG

NOW that the evenfall is come,
And the sun fills the flaring trees,
And everything is mad, lit, dumb,
And in the pauses of the breeze
A far voice seems to call me home,
To haven beyond woods and leas,

I feel again how sharply stings
The spell which binds our troubled dust
With hint of divine frustrated things,—
The soul's deep doubt and desperate trust
That she at sunset shall find wings
To bear her beyond "*now*" and "*must*."

So place your head against my head,
And set your lips upon my lips,
That so I may be comforted. . . .
For, ah! the world so from me slips,
To the World-Sunset I am sped,
Where Soul and Silence come to grips,
And love stands sore astonished.

LAWFORD,
Summer, 1918.

VI.—AURELIA

WHEN within my arms I hold you,
Motionless in long surrender,
Then what love-words can I summon,
Tender as my heart is tender?

When within your arms you hold me,
And kisses speak your love unspoken,
Then my eyes with tears run over,
And my very heart is broken.

VII.—PLAINT OF A HUMBLE SERVANT

For EDWARD ELGAR

O LORD, Who didst create all things
That run on legs or rise on wings,
Who, in Thy equal care of all,
Dost no less mark the sparrow's fall
Than of great sinner or great saint,
Hear, Lord, and judge this my complaint.

Thou, Who didst shape the lion and lamb
Thou seest of what shape I am—
Not lovely as those creatures are,
But gawky, rude, familiar,
In any field or market-place:
The jackiest jackass of my race.

Not much is it that is implored
By me, Thy creature, of my Lord;
I do not seek that Thou shouldst change
That which to His eyes was not strange
When on my grandad's grandad's hide
Thy Son toward Zion deigned to ride;
Since that He honoured, though all scoff,

[57]

Plaint of a Humble Servant

I yet do bear nor would put off. . . .
But, Lord—came it of wisdom dark,
Or that Thy hand did cease to mark
That which it shaped through weariness
Of fashioning beasts great and less—
Thou hast on me, Thy hapless jade,
Another grievous burden laid.

For upon saints' days, when I stand
Holiday-making 'twixt the sand
Of the bright foreshore and the steeple,
Whereunder crowd the stiff-starched people
To pay Thee homage, each great ear
Must a heavenly chorus hear—
First overhead ting-tang the bells,
Then in the aisle the organ swells,
Praising Thee, Lord, till deep and strong
The happy folk take up the song,
Till the gay birds outside, too, raise
A sweet, wild, shrilling song of praise,
And, last, the very sea rejoices
To join its deep voice to those voices.

Mark now what grief, Lord, must be mine,
Who do not find Thee less divine;
For dare I also raise my voice
That among these I may rejoice,
Ah, what a hell of sound I draw
Who can but sing "Ee-aw! Hee-aw!"

Plaint of a Humble Servant

O shame! O grief! on every bush
The pert birds scold or bid me hush;
And, worst of all, my master hies
Out from the church with angry cries,
And, save I forthwith cease, his stick
Showers blows upon me fast and thick!

Natheless, Thou knowest I would sing
Praise fit, if could I, to my King. . . .
Lord, must I be for ever dumb?
Needs wait I till Thy kingdom come?
There was old Balaam's ass which spoke. . . .
May not another of that folk?

Lord—last—but this: at Thy behest
All's done as seemeth to Thee best,
Were it not but a little thing
To Thee to let a jackass sing,
No less than proud sinner or poor saint?
That is all, Lord. So ends my plaint.

ON THE RIVER,
April, 1918.

VIII.—THE LITTLE ROOM

HOW far away the world seems now
While we two watch alone,
Our fiery-calyxed blossom grow
Visible, erst to sight unknown:

Deserted miles of mazy streets
Compass the house around:
Here at Love's labyrinth-heart each greets
Holiness, uttering no sound.

Slowly our thoughts through eyes revolve
Each other's rounded good, . . .
Long glances mingle and dissolve
Silent as mood ebbs into mood.

Sometimes twin hands enfold a face,
Touching with but scarce a touch,
And the eyes' currents, deepened, race,
Exchanging what no hand can clutch.

Sometimes the hands, all quiet, slip
Behind the leaning head,
And silent lip meets silent lip,
When speak we though no word is said.

The Little Room

O holiness! O quiet! Belov'd,
Time was when we did lack,
Unrecognised of each we moved,
Have we not set blind Fortune back?

We thank thee, spirit of love, who are
Foreign to Time and Doom,
Freed by thee of this dying star
Here in this love-filled little room!

LONDON,
Winter, 1918-19.

IX.—THE FLOWER OF FLAME

1

AS round the cliff I came alone
The whole bay bared its blaze to me;
Loud sang the wind, the wild sun shone,
The tumbled clouds fled scattering on,
Light shattered on wave and winking stone,
And in the glassy midst stood one
Brighter than sun or cloud or sea.

She, with flame-vehement hair untied,
Virginal in her fluttering dress,
Watched, deafened and all dazzle-eyed,
Each opulent breaker's crash and glide,
And now flung arms up high and wide,
As if, possessing all, she cried
Her beauty, youth, and happiness.

Loud rang the waves and higher, higher,
The surge in chains of light was flung,
The wind as in a wild desire
Licked round her form—she seemed a spire
Of sunny drift! a fount of fire!

[62]

The Flower of Flame

The hymn of some triumphant lyre
Which sounded when the world was young!

Purified by the scalding glare,
Swept clear by the salty sea-wind's flow,
My eyes knew you for what you are—
The demon thing for which we dare,
Which breaks us, which we bid not spare,
The life, the light, the heavenly snare,
The turreted city's overthrow.
Helen, I knew you standing there!

2

The long, low wavelets of summer
Glide in and glitter along the sand;
The fitful breezes of summer
Blow fragrantly from the land.

Side by side we lie silent
Between sunned cliffs and blown seas:
Our eyes more bright than sea ripples,
Our breaths more light than the breeze.

When a gust meets a wave that advances,
The wave leaps, flames, falls with a hiss:
So lightly, so brightly, each heart leaps.
When our dumb lips touch in a kiss.

[63]

The Flower of Flame

3

Yet warm the water is. Come, let us stand
Before the midnight summer sea's blue round,
Where the deep draught wells up the steep dim
strand
With seldom foam, ever love-satiate sound.

Hush; pledge our eyes that are as brimmed with
love
As is the pearly planet brimmed with light
Now circles in our eyes and soars above,
Venus, the sun of lovers and of night.

Shine, full calm orb, brim, spill, and spilling bless
The splendour and peace in heart of loved and
lover,
Until our eyes, brimmed with pure love-excess,
Bright with calm tears, splendid as thou, spill over!

Not Venus only! each unquenchable fire
With marvel, and love, and blessing, O look down;
See Lion and Archer, Virgin see and Lyre,
Earth's Eagle plight Earth's Swan beneath the
Crown!

Question not now as in Earth's many days
Loveless and solitary have questioned ye;

[64]

The Flower of Flame

Hymn rather on your huge and happy ways
This betrothed love ye, burning, sing to see.

There is not room enough in Time and Space
Fully to hymn the magnificence of love;
Begone, O stars, upon your heavenly race!
Be silent, lips that cannot speak enough

Even in the adoring kisses that we share,
Who locked in love-night, night ethereal,
Grieve but to find our glory singular,
Which outruns, outshines, outsings, outlives All!

4

Foamless the gradual waters well
From the sheer deep, where darkness lies,
Till to the shoulder rock they swell
With a slow cumulance of sighs.

O waters, gather up your strength
From the blind caves of your unrest,
Loose your load utterly at length
Over the moonlight-marbled breast.

There sleep, diffused, the long dim hours,
Nor let your love-locks be withdrawn,
Till round the world-horizon glowers
The wrath and chaos of the dawn.

[65]

The Flower of Flame

5

She picked a whorled shell from the beach,
And laid it close beside her ear;
Then held it, frightened, at full reach,
Toward my face that I might hear.

And while she leaned and while I heard,
Our dumb eyes dared not meet for shame,
Our hearts within us sickly stirred,
Our limbs ran wax before the flame.

For in the despairing voice and meek
An echo to our hearts we found,
Who through love-striving vainly seek
To coop the infinite in bound.

6

All is estranged to-day.
Chastened and meek,
Side by side taking our way,
With what anguish we seek
To dare each to face the other, or even to speak!

The sun like an opal drifts
Through a vaporous shine,
Or overwhelms itself in dark rifts,
On the sea's far line

[66]

The Flower of Flame

Sheer light falls in a single sword like a sign.
The sea, striving in its bed
Like a corpse that awakes,
Slowly heaves up its lustreless head,
Crowned with weeds and snakes,
To strike at the shore, baring fangs as it breaks.

Something threatening earth
Aims at our love;
Gone is our ignorant mirth,
Love like speech of the dove;
The Sword and the Snake have seen and pro-
claim now "Enough!"

7

The narrow pathway winds its course
Through dwarfish oaks and junipers,
Till suddenly beyond the gorse
We glimpse the copse of stunted firs

That tops the headland, round whose base
The cold tide flings a drowned man's bones
All day against the cliff's sheer face,
All night prolongs his lasting groans.

The Drowned—who in the copse once stood
Waiting the Dead: to end both vows—

[67]

The Flower of Flame

Heard, as we hear, the split of wood
And shrieking of the writhen boughs

Grow shrill and shriller. Pass the spot.
The strained boughs arch toward collapse.
A whistle, and—crack! there's the shot!
Or is it but a bough which snaps?

Ever, when we have left the gorse,
And through the copse each hastening hies,
We, lovers on the self-same course,
Dare not look in each other's eyes.

8

Before I woke I knew her gone,
Though nothing nigh had stirred;
Now by the curtain inward blown
She stood, not seen, but heard,
Where the faint moonlight dimmed or shone . . .
And neither spoke a word.

One hand against her mouth she pressed,
But could not staunch its cry;
The other knocked upon her breast
Impotently . . . while I
Glared rigid, labouring, possessed,
And dared not ask her why.

[68]

The Flower of Flame

9

Noon; and now rocks the summer sea
All idleness, one gust alone
Skates afar off, and soundlessly
Is gone from me as you are gone.

No hull creeps on th' horizon's rim,
No pond of smoke wreathes the far sky,
Only the dazzling sinuous swim
Of the fierce tide-maze scalds the eye.

Alone, aloft, unendingly,
A peering gull on moveless wing
Floats silent by and again by
In search for some indefinite thing.

Each wave-line glittering through its run
Gives, in its splash where still pools lie
Upstaring at the downstaring sun,
A single harsh and sudden sigh.

And oh, more lonely blows the breeze,
More empty shines the perfect sky,
More solitary sound the seas
Where two watched, where now watch but I!

[69]

The Flower of Flame

10

I love a flower which has no lover,
The yellow sea-poppy is its name;
Spined leaves its glaucous green stem cover,
Its flower is a yellow fitful flame.

Stung by the spray which leaps the shingle,
Torn by the winds that scour the beach,
Its roots with the salt sea-wrack mingle,
Its leaves upon the bleached stones bleach.

Its desperate growth but few remember,
None misses it when it has died—
Scorched by the sun to a scant ember
Or wholly ravaged by the tide.

Yet I elect this weed to cherish,
Nor any other would desire
Than this, which must so shortly perish
Tortured by sea-foam or sky-fire.

Above this flower we two once bended,
Drawn to it by a subtle spell,
On whom the fire of heaven descended,
Over whom the wave arose from hell.

[70]

The Flower of Flame

Frantic, she snatched the ragged blossom,
Kissed it then with a wild, fierce kiss,
Pressed spine and flame into her bosom,
Crying, "The flower! our love is this!"

The grey waves crash. The wind whirls over.
The flower is withered from the beach,
Whose waves divide the loved and lover,
Whose wind blows louder than their speech.

11

The moon behind high tranquil leaves
Hides her sad head;
The dwindled water tinkles and grieves
In the stream's black bed;

And where now, where are you sleeping?

The shadowy nightjar, hawking gnats,
Flickers or floats;
High in still air the flurrying bats
Repeat their wee notes;

And where now, where are you sleeping?

Silent lightning flutters in heaven,
Where quiet crowd
By the toil of an upper whirlwind driven
Dark legions of cloud;

In whose arms now are you sleeping?

The Flower of Flame

The cloud makes, lidding the sky's wan hole,
The world a tomb;
Far out at sea long thunders roll
From gloom to dim gloom;
In whose arms now are you sleeping?

Rent clouds, like boughs, in darkness hang
Close overhead;
The foreland's bell-buoy begins to clang
As if for the dead;
Awake they where you are sleeping?
The chasms crack; the heavens revolt;
With tearing sound
Bright bolt volleys on flaring bolt,
Wave and cloud clash; through deep, through vault,
Huge thunders rebound!
But they wake not where you are sleeping.

HARLECH, *June*, 1919;
LAWFORD, *Aug.*, 1919.

X.—YESTERDAY

For SIEGFRIED SASSOON

1.—CASUALTY

THEY are bringing him down.
He looks at me wanly.

The bandages are brown,
Brown with mud, red only—
But how deep a red!—in the breast of the shirt
Deepening red, too, as each whistling breath
Is drawn with the suck of a slow-filling squirt,
While waxen cheeks waste to the pallor of death.

O my comrade,
My comrade, that you could rest
Your tired body on mine! That your head might
be laid—

Fallen and heavy—upon this my breast!
That I might take your hands in my hands
To chafe! That, abandoned, your body might
sink

Upon mine, which here helplessly, grievously
stands;

That your body might drink
Warmth from my body, strength from my veins,

Yesterday

Life from my heart, that monstrously beats
After you vainly!

The trench curves. They are gone.

The steep rain teems down.

O my companion!
Who were you? How did you come
Looking so vainly upon me? I know—
And oh, how immensely long I have known—
Those aching eyes, numb face, gradual gloom,
That depth without groan!

Take now my love—this love which alone
I can give you—and shed without pain
That life, if I could, I would succour
With this, the pulse of my own!

2.—THE SECRET

SUDDENLY with a shy, sad grace
She turns to me her lighted face,
And I who hear some idle phrase
Watch how her wry lips move,
And guess that the poor words they frame
Mean nought, for they would speak the same
Message I read in the dark flame
Within her eyes, which say, "I love."
But I can only turn away . . .

[74]

I, that have heard the deep voice break
Into a sing-song sobbing shake,
Whose flutter made by being quake,
 What ears have I for women's cries?
I, that have seen the turquoise glaze
Fixed in the blue and quivering gaze
Of one whom cocaine cannot daze,
 How can I yield to woman's eyes?
 I, who can only turn away.

I, that have held strong hands which palter,
Borne the full weight of limbs that falter,
Bound live flesh on the surgeon's altar,
 What need have I of woman's hand?
I, that have felt the dead's embrace;
I, whose arms were his resting-place;
I, that have kissed a dead man's face;
 Ah, but how should you understand?
 Now I can only turn away.

TORQUAY,
 March, 1918.

3.—BURIAL PARTY AT PASCHAENDAEL

THIS is the Wilderness: the rain teems down.
Over the ridge the ghastly pistol-light
Hangs like a bubble on the darkness blown.
The death-machines begin. Flight upon flight
[75]

Yesterday

Of hurrying bullets scythe the lower air,
And the rain steadily falls. A sheeted flicker
In the dense pour proclaims with crash and flare
The spouting shell. "Sergeant, cannot the men be
quicker?"

"It's heavy work, sir!" "We've no time to spare.
The padre's coming." "The rain makes 'em numb."
"Get on with it. . . ." Shades splash amid the mess.
The rain teems down. The writhen waste is dumb,
Defiled, defaced, shamed in its hopelessness.
This is the Ultimate Hell, the Wilderness
To which all Youth, Laughter, and Love must come:
Twelve graves brutishly scraped among the slime.
If Christ were here! If Christ could seem to have
been!

Let not their mothers till long aftertime
Come to this hill—when, maybe, 'twill be green,
When harebells shake or when the furry rime
Hides the gorged craters that they be not seen.
For came they sooner, looking on the skies,
The withered skies, the obscene waste below,
What power had then their wrinkled memories
To summon up that little while ago,
When small hands clutched, when stared the round
bright eyes,
When rosy, bubbled mouths opened to crow
A world-engendered mirth and baby-joy,
To those whose children now lie here arow?

Yesterday

Mothers! now made the saddest word in speech—
They would not gaze. Impotent would they fall,
Scared at the Nothing in the heart which each
Must find, fronting the solitude, and all
The crosses dotted far as the eye can reach.
O Christ! Sweet Christ!

“Now, sir, we’ve almost done.”
“I’m coming.” “They’re a-layin’ of ’em in.”
The shadows totter by. “An ’eavy one.”
“’Tis the mud on ’em.” “Young, ’e mus’ a’ bin.”
“I’ve got a stitch.” “O God, I felt ’is skin!”
“Stop it!” “Be carefu’ how ye take en, mun:
His legs be broken.” “Quit palaverin’;
Get on with it: what’s done can’t be undone.”

“What’s that man doing, sergeant? Is he sick?
Get on with it there, man!” “A bloody gal.”
“Find out!” “Well, what’s the matter with yer,
chick?”
“It can’t be ’elped—— Sorry, sir, spoke too quick:
’E’s but a youngster, sir. . . . ’E’s found ’is pal.”
This is the Wilderness; the rain teems down.
“Padre!” “I know, boy. Cuts one like a knife.
Poor boy! I know. Their pains were all His own.
Hush! . . . hush! *‘I am the Resurrection and the
Life.’*”

LAWFORD,
Summer, 1918.

4.—DAWN ON THE SOMME

LAST night rain fell over the scarred plateau,
And now from the dark horizon, dazzling,
flies

Arrow on fire-plumed arrow to the skies,
Shot from the bright arc of Apollo's bow;
And from the wild and writhen waste below,
From flashing pools and mounds lit one by one,
Oh, is it mist, or are these companies
Of morning heroes who arise, arise
With thrusting arms, with limbs and hair aglow,
Toward the risen god, upon whose brow
Burns the gold laurel of all victories,
Hero and heroes' god, th' invincible Sun?

Late Spring, 1918.

XI.—NOVEMBER

AS I walk the misty hill
All is languid, fogged, and still;
Not a note of any bird
Nor any motion's hint is heard,
Save from soaking thickets round
Trickle or water's rushing sound,
And from ghostly trees the drip
Of runnel dew or whispering slip
Of leaves, which in a body launch
Listlessly from the stagnant branch
To strew the marl, already strown,
With litter sodden as its own,

A rheum, like blight, hangs on the briars,
And from the clammy ground suspires
A sweet, frail, sick autumnal scent
Of stale frost furring weeds long spent;
And wafted on, like one who sleeps,
A feeble vapour hangs or creeps,
Exhaling on the fungus mould
A breath of age, fatigue, and cold.
Oozed from the bracken's desolate track,
By dark rains havocked and drenched black,

November

A fog about the coppice drifts,
Or slowly thickens up and lifts
Into the moist, despondent air.

Mist, grief, and stillness everywhere. . . .

And in me, too, there is no sound
Save welling as of tears profound,
Where in me cloud, grief, stillness reign,
And an intolerable pain
Begins.

 Rolled on as in a flood there come
Memories of childhood, boyhood, home,
And that which, sudden, pangs me most,
Thought of the first-belov'd, long lost,
Too easy lost! My cold lips frame
Tremulously the familiar name,
Unheard of her upon my breath:
"Elizabeth. Elizabeth."

No voice answers on the hill,
All is shrouded, sad, and still. . . .
Stillness, fogged brakes, and fog on high.
Only in me the waters cry
Who mourn the hours now slipped for ever,
Hours of boding, joy, and fever,
When we loved, by chance beguiled,
I a boy and you a child—
Child, but with an angel's air,

Astonished, eager, unaware,
Or elfin's, wandering with grace
Foreign to any fireside race,
And with a gaiety unknown
In the light feet and hair backblown,
And with a sadness yet more strange,
In meagre cheeks which knew to change
Or faint or fired more swift than sight,
And forlorn hands and lips pressed white,
And fragile voice, and head downcast,
Hiding tears, lifted at the last
To speed with one pale smile the wise
Glance of the grey immortal eyes.

How strange it was that we should dare
Compound a miracle so rare
As, 'twixt this pace and Time's next pace,
Each to discern th' elected's face!
Yet stranger that the high sweet fire,
In hearts nigh foreign to desire,
Could burn, sigh, weep, and burn again
As oh, it never has since then!
Most strange of all that we so young
Dared learn but would not speak love's tongue,
Love pledged but in the reveries
Of our sad and dreaming eyes. . . .

Now upon such journey bound me,
Grief, disquiet, and stillness round me,

November

As bids me where I cannot tell,
Turn I and sign, unseen, farewell.
Breathe the name as soft as mist,
Lips, which nor kissed her nor were kissed!
And again—a sigh, a death—
“Elizabeth. Elizabeth.”

No voice answers; but the mist
Glow for a moment amethyst
Ere the hid sun dissolves away,
And dimness, growing dimmer grey,
Hides all . . . till nothing can I see
But the blind walls enclosing me,
And no sound and no motion hear
But the vague water throbbing near,
Sole voice upon the darkening hill
Where all is blank and dead and still.

DARTMOOR, *Nov.*, 1917;

THE BLACK MOUNTAINS, *Autumn*, 1919.

XII.—WINTER OVERNIGHT

For ROBERT GRAVES

R. N. THE world's new! there is not a sound:
Whiteness and silence all around.
Jewels hang clustered in the trees,
The light aches, and the levels freeze;
And with this sharp sweet air we drink
All serene thoughts a man can think
This side of heaven—until it seems
Heaven's here and not within our dreams:
Heaven just so white, so bright, so still,
As this white air and that white hill,
Wherein sight's fixed and sound is caught
Into one pure celestial thought.

R. G. So bright, so white—but not so still!
Hark how those rascals up the hill,
Not one that's twelve years old yet, shout!
How fly their snowy balls about!
On the lake, too, with coats flung wide,
See the fantastic skaters glide;
While on this world, full-faced and brown,
The sun from a hoar heaven smiles down.
Your beauty's there—but if you please,
If we stand still in it we freeze.

Winter Overnight

My heaven's like *that*—its hillsides glow
With even a more daring snow,
My trees' gems hang as crystalline,
Yet dance and clinkle as they shine.

Bright-eyed, red-cheeked, with tousled hair,
My cherubs foray here and there,
Cracking the sky with jolly shout,
Banding the brittle snow about;
Over the still and glassy sea,
Crested like gryphons of Chaldee,
Vast seraphs, on fire-wings flung wide,
Speed and ring and singing glide;
While on it all, leaned out above,
God, like a swarthy Sol, showers love.

S. S. Both heavens are good—but of the two . . .
Judge for me, World, now: which would you?

NEW YORK,
Jan., 1919.

XIII.—SOUL AND SONG

SEE the lark leap,
Scattering dew. One vault!
Singing he takes the steep,
Nor to sing need halt.

O laden heart,
Which would to the height
So speed, with what ill art
Thou takest thy flight.

Stubborn thy will
That, despite weak wing,
Thine be the miracle
Both to climb and sing!

XIV.—CLOSING LINES
FROM "POLYPHEMUS HIS PASSION:
A PASTORAL"

For THOMAS EARP

S*HEPHERD.* Thus found he his loved Galatea
fled
With Acis! What rage ensued thou knowest.
Deceived, dejected, foiled, and overthrown,
In hoarse distraction a full sev'n days' term
He ranged, but on the eighth no more was glimpsed
Striding from vale to vale, nor, raging, heard
Splintering the pine-slope nigh the precipice
With fist far flung, nor with a desolate
Thunder of voice, volleyed from scarp to jag,
Dislodging from ribbed snowfields friths compact
In downward avalanche: less loud than he.
And we had earned no tide of him, had I,
In wandering quest of some mischanced beast,
Not happened on him as I picked my way
Among the withies of a seaward vale.

Girl. Lubberly still, poor wretch? or quiet grown?

Shepherd. He on an ocean pinnacle of rock
Sat, scowling, motionless. In truth he seemed
Rather a further buttress of the crag
Than a giant, helpless, and unhappy being.

“Polyphemus His Passion: A Pastoral”

About his brooding bulk all day the birds,
The slippery swallow, the wind-cleaving martin,
Lifted or swept a-scatter ev'n as when,
Chatting, such gad around the ravaged mien
Of the colossal Pharaoh or twin gods,
Hawk-headed and immense, of ruined Egypt.
Thus grieved he. And the huge begnarlèd hands
Pillared his jaw. A chillness gloomed his face
As on bare hills shadow of resting cloud.
Nor spake he aught. But when the sun raged high,
Grappling a rock he dashed it 'gainst his breast,
And roared till the golden-green sea blackened,
And, spouting, drove, loud with careering gulls,
Before his gusty breath; but, passion spent,
Drooping, then pined, while from the single eye
One tear, as huge and hot as Phlegethon,
Fell in a hissing flood.

Girl. Alas, poor brute!

And yet I laugh.

Shepherd. Long time disconsolate
Bowed he his massy head, quite dumb with grief.
But, at the last, confusedly arousing
His sluggish hands, groped for and found his pipes,
Twin, dry, boughless trunks of beech fire-hollowed,
And with huge cinder slotted. These he set
To cave-like mouth, then, pursing hairy lips,
Vented, with monster fingers laid on stops,
His heart's deep sorrow: 'twas a wounding sound.

Girl. And was it angry, then, the giant's plaint?

“Polyphemus His Passion: A Pastoral”

Shepherd. Angry 'twas not: though anger in it
spake

As of a rebel turning eye to heav'n,
With moody imprecation natural
To one so crossed from birth. Melancholy
Lent majesty to strains uncouth. He mourned
The gift of might which is his mightiest foe—
Mourned, though the dire pipes themselves rebelling
Came apt not to his hand. With rage he shook,
Yet, obstinate, subdued them to his mood
So that they brimmed the dusky lower air,
The fire-strewn skies, flushèd cliffs, and tawny sea,
With the beauty borne of desolation.
Thus lingered he.

Girl. And of the tune itself—

Ugly, was it?

Shepherd. Listen: when twilight fell,
While the near wave lapsed with but seldom foam,
Darkling against the light foretells the moon,
He still played on. “Strange end,” thought I, “thou
hast!”

Since, it must seem, his heart is shipwrecked now:
Heart, but not song! For as the night waxed late
Somewhat of beauty found he, and with beauty
Somewhat of solace. To the last I listened
The while the new-minted moon voyaged the swells,
And multitudes of sea-sprites, glistening,
Rose up in choir, but, sudden, hushed to hear
Such grief pine on. Thus somewhat was the sound—

"Polyphemus His Passion: A Pastoral"

Like to the baffled wind among the crags
When night is clear, sprent with a light diffuse,
And lightless clouds drift on a glimmering sky;
Or as the mournful blowing of the waves,
Which in the pyloned gloom of norward cave
Nightly with flood soon-swallowed and discharge
Of pouring foam, deep tide, and troubled ebb,
Makes profound plaint and dreary melody
To lightless waste, huge night, and solemn stars.
Such was the Cyclops' music.

Girl.

Ah, poor soul!

Shepherd. Dost weep?

Girl.

Yes, shepherd.

Shepherd.

Fie, now; comfort thee!

The gods wax angry at a lass's tears
Who has no whit to cry for. Thus, say I,
Those there are who ev'n by living darken
The lives of such as are less passionate—
Yet in their fall, by ev'n the full measure
That they o'ertopped us, must we mourn for them:
Such wonder has Life bared.

Girl.

Maybe 'tis so;

Still, I am sorry.

Shepherd.

Yield thee now thine arm;

So: round my neck as mine sinks now round
thine . . .

Evening falls. Hear the brook in the spinney:

Thy very voice.

Girl.

And . . . is yon star Venus?

[89]

5512 A'

"Polyphemus His Passion: A Pastoral"

Shepherd. Aye: Venus 'tis. Thou hast eyes like
heaven.

Girl. Love is a pretty thing. Kiss me, sweet
shepherd.

LAMORNA,
June, 1917.

XV.—SWANSONG

For PHILIP HESELTINE

1

THE wood is still. I do not hear
A single bird-song grieved or gay,
Or other sound's hint than the sere
Whispering of withered leaves downstrewn
On the spent leaves of yesterday,
And a hid footstep drawing near.

My heart is still. I do not hear
A human echo grieved or gay
Such as has been this or that year,
Only the sigh of my words downstrewn
On the spent words of yesterday,
And Death's hushed footstep drawing near.

2

O Nightingale, my heart,
How sad thou art!
How heavy is thy wing,
Desperately whirrèd that thy throat may fling

[91]

Swansong

Song to the tingling silences remote!
Thine eye, whose ruddy spark
Burned firey of late,
How dead and dark!
Why so soon didst thou sing,
And with such turbulence of love and hate?

Learn that there is no singing yet can bring
The expected dawn more near;
And thou art spent already, though the night
Scarce has begun;
What voice, what eyes, wilt thou have for the light
When that light shall appear,
And O what wings to bear thee t'ward the sun?

3

It is still under the pines.
Only the winds flow,
Murmuring low, murmuring low,
Through the tops where the unseen sun shines.

It is still below;
Never a bee
Booms over the mat of cones and spines;
It is dark; no flowers blow;
Only afar a harsh pool glints. . . .
The heart beats heavily, sad, and slow,

Seeking in vain for any hints
Of a Nature cares if Man suffer or no.
Vain search! It is so
Dark, so still, so lonely under the pines.

4

Alas, poor rhapsodist, how sad thou art!
Is thine hour come? so soon, then, must thou part?
Hush we our concert now to thy hushed heart,
And with our measure ease thy onfaring way.

Pale Memory, saddest witness of delight,
Whose eyes with gathered tears now glisten bright
More than with joy they glittered yesternight,
With thy lorn voice begin this roundelay.

Thou Solitude, the Strange Companion,
Heard faintly of the few and seen of none,
On thy weak pipe of ever-wandering tone
Through and about this ditty weaving play.

Proud Sorrow, shadowy-haired with starlit crest,
On thy black heavy lyre, whose sharp heel pressed
Over thy buried heart destroys thy breast,
Make mourn thy moaning chords beneath the lay.

So sooth our concert now thou shalt not hear
The fan of secret sandals feathering near,

Swansong

Nor shall we mark we play to no man's ear—
When thou with Sleep art stolen away.

5

Put by the sun, my joyful soul,
We are for darkness that is whole;

Put by the wine, now for long years
We must be thirsty with salt tears;

Put by the rose, bind thou instead
The fierce thorns about thy head;

Put by the courteous tire, we need
But the poor pilgrim's blackest weed;

Put by—albeit with tears—thy lute,
Sing but to God or else be mute.

Take leave of friends save such as dare
Thy love with Loneliness to share.

It is full tide. Put by regret.
Turn, turn away. Forget. Forget.

Put by the sun, my lightless soul,
We are for darkness that is whole.

[94]

D.R.

Feb 5. 1900

